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TYPICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE ORIENT  
By H. O. Tanner

## POETRY AND PATHOS OF ORIENTAL RUGS

"The time is coming, has already begun to arrive," wrote S. G. W. Benjamin, painter, student, and author, recently, "when Orientals will import steam-made carpets from Europe for their own use; the manufacture of Oriental rugs will then cease as the home demand falls off. Wages in the East will also gradually rise with the general rise of wages the world over, and this in turn will put a prohibitory value on rugs which depend for their chief beauty on manual labor and individuality of expression. And then the Persian rug will become a thing of the past."

Mr. Benjamin would seem to sound the knell of one of the choicest forms of Eastern art. Oriental rugs have grown in popularity for years throughout the Occidental world, and their use in a sense has become a vogue. Their fineness of texture, their durability, their uniqueness of design, the richness and harmony of their coloring, even their pronounced irregularities of shape, which are a witness of the crude methods and plodding toil of their makers, have been prized. While few purchasers, perhaps, would contend that the rugs of the Orient are superior in pattern and finish to the products of Western looms, the use of Oriental rugs in house-furnishing is commonly regarded as an evidence of good taste.

Indeed, to meet the demand for this class of art product, Western merchants have invaded the East, and sought to direct, if not to monopolize, the business of manufacture. They have undertaken

wisely, doubtless, to dictate as regards patterns and qualities; but business policy, the commercial sense that attaches value to hand-made goods, has restrained them from interfering with the old method of manufacture, and throughout the rug-making districts of the Orient to-day the work is done practically as it was thousands of years ago.

It is to the commercial interest of the West to maintain the old régime. The Orientals are conservative to a fault, slow to grasp new ideas and adopt new methods, enamored, one might say, of crudity and makeshift. And it remains to be seen how long it will take the spirit of the West to pervade the hamlets of the East, cause the rug-makers to revolt against the drudgery to which they have become inured by custom, and realize Mr. Benjamin's prediction.

There is a certain poetry and pathos about Oriental rugs that few purchasers, perhaps, in the West ever think of. The family or tribal legends worked out in the patterns, the religious or ethical meaning to the makers of the blended colors, the toil and privation of which every rug is a witness—these for the most part have been matters of interest only to the student. Little has been printed on the subject of Oriental rug-making. Western lovers of the beautiful only see and admire—and purchase if they can.

A few facts first on the prosaic side of the business of rug-making. Had Hood lived in the East, he would have written the "Song of the Rug," and his "Stitch, stitch, stitch, in poverty, hunger, and dirt," would have been "Tie, tie, tie," etc., with some depressing Eastern monosyllable at the end of a line to take the place of "shirt" and rhyme with "rug." It is woman's work, or was so until recent years, when commercialism impelled a few of the men to take a hand in the business. When we look upon and admire these precious treasures of the East, no two of them alike, each true in general to the family pattern, but all exhibiting the minor license of the individual makers, admiration of the art is apt to blind us to the condition of the women behind it. A few figures may serve to show that art is as long and as poorly paid in the Orient as in the Occident.

A square foot of the best Persian rug is commonly estimated as worth about ten dollars, and an expert weaver working with the regularity and assiduity born of necessity requires twenty-three days for the completion of this portion. The weaver is thus allowed only about forty-four cents a day for her wool and her labor. Three-fourths of this amount goes to pay for the wool, which leaves eleven cents a day for the labor of the artist.

Better wages are earned in producing cheaper goods. An expert weaver can make a square foot of inferior rug, which is sold for about sixty cents, in two days. In this case inferior wool and cheaper dye are used. Though this allows the weaver only thirty cents a day for her wool and her labor, the portion of the amount that can legitimately be termed wages is relatively larger. The poorer rugs, more-

over, are twenty or thirty times as large as the superior, which enables the operator to make better time.

On the other hand, the woman who makes cheap rugs works at a disadvantage, since she has to buy her wool, dye it, finish her rug, watch the market for buyers, and bide her time for a sale. The better class rugs, on the contrary, are usually made on order and are paid for when ordered, or at least an advance of pay is made to permit the operator to subsist.

With the reward of from ten to fifteen cents for an average day's work, it can readily be seen that the lot of the rug-weavers is anything but an enviable one. Penury necessitates the simplest fare. An average meal consists of bread, with a little cheese or a raw onion by way of delicacy. In some districts it is even impossible for the weavers to work in the open air, since the excessive temperature dries out the threads and robs them of their elasticity. Hence the weavers are forced into underground places, where they maintain sufficient moisture to keep the wool in workable condition by keeping at hand utensils full of water.

In the West factories are subject to public surveillance, and "sweat-shop" has become a word of odium. Many an Oriental rug that we prize as a work of art is pieced out thread by thread under conditions for which a Western sweat-shop could furnish no parallel.

A word as to the different knots used will also be of interest as showing the enormous amount of work involved in the making of a rug. Of course the finer the quality of the goods produced, the closer are the knots. The different "stitches" are as follows: seven by eight, or fifty-six hand-tied knots to the square inch; eight by eight, or sixty-four knots to the square inch; ten by ten, or one hundred knots to the square inch; twelve by twelve, or one hundred and forty-four knots to the square inch; and sixteen by sixteen, or two hundred and fifty-six knots to the square inch.

The woman, therefore, who carries a pattern in her head, and deftly manipulates her threads so as to produce the required harmony of colors for a rug of the best quality, is obliged to tie about thirty-seven thousand knots in making a square foot of carpet, for which she receives as her remuneration the princely sum of two dollars and fifty cents. In short, drudgery, unqualified, unmitigated, by operatives poorly paid, poorly housed, and poorly fed, is the price of every rug over which Western connoisseurs grow enthusiastic. Art affords no more striking example of pathetic conditions. But the women weavers of the East do their work uncomplainingly, since custom has made them content, and contentment is happiness.

Week after week, month after month, year after year, the women weavers of the East sit before their primitive looms—two poles set upright in the ground, with a cross-piece at the top, to which the warp is fastened, and a similar cross-piece at the bottom, on which the

finished rug is rolled as it is manufactured thread by thread. Every piece of wool is worked in with the fingers, not with a shuttle, as in the West. There is no guide as to pattern but memory, and hence

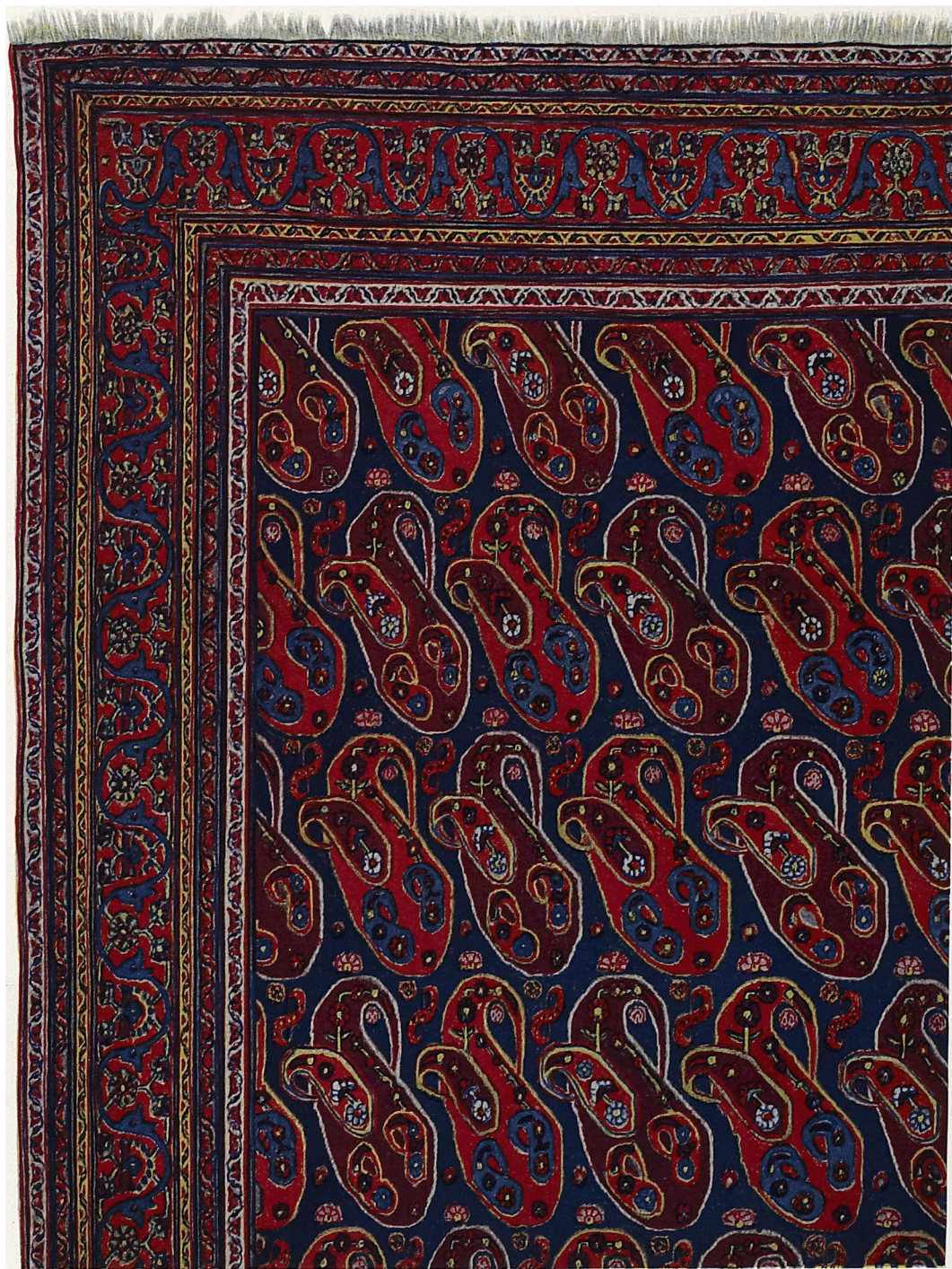


HAMADAN CAMEL'S-HAIR RUG

From "Rugs Oriental and Occidental"

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arises one of the peculiar charms of the Oriental rugs. No two are alike, however much they may resemble each other in a general way. It would not be possible in the whole Orient to find two rugs absolutely identical in pattern.



ORIENTAL RUG  
From "Rugs Oriental and Occidental"  
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The work of the weavers becomes almost mechanical. Adaptability to it in a large sense becomes a matter of heredity. The fingers instinctively work in the wool in proper measure and tie the knots



OLD GHIORDES RUG  
From "Rugs Oriental and Occidental"  
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with the proper degree of firmness, and the eye detects instantly any lack of harmony in the color scheme that would impair the beauty and richness of the finished product.

The dyeing of the wool in itself becomes an art which one gen-

eration transmits to another. It is interesting in this connection to note the peculiar significance attached in different countries of the East to particular colors. The Egyptians regarded black as the symbol of error; white, as the emblem of purity; red, of zeal; yellow, of sorrow; blue, of truth. The Babylonians worked their religion into their rugs, making scarlet stand for fire, blue for air, and purple for water. The Persians have an abhorrence of light shades, and are partial to dark greens and yellows. With them black and indigo represent sorrow; rose, divine wisdom; and green, the initiation into the wisdom of the Most High. The Turks regard green as sacred, and bar that color from their rugs. With the Chinese, yellow is the symbol of royalty; red, of virtue; white, of mourning; and black, of depravity.

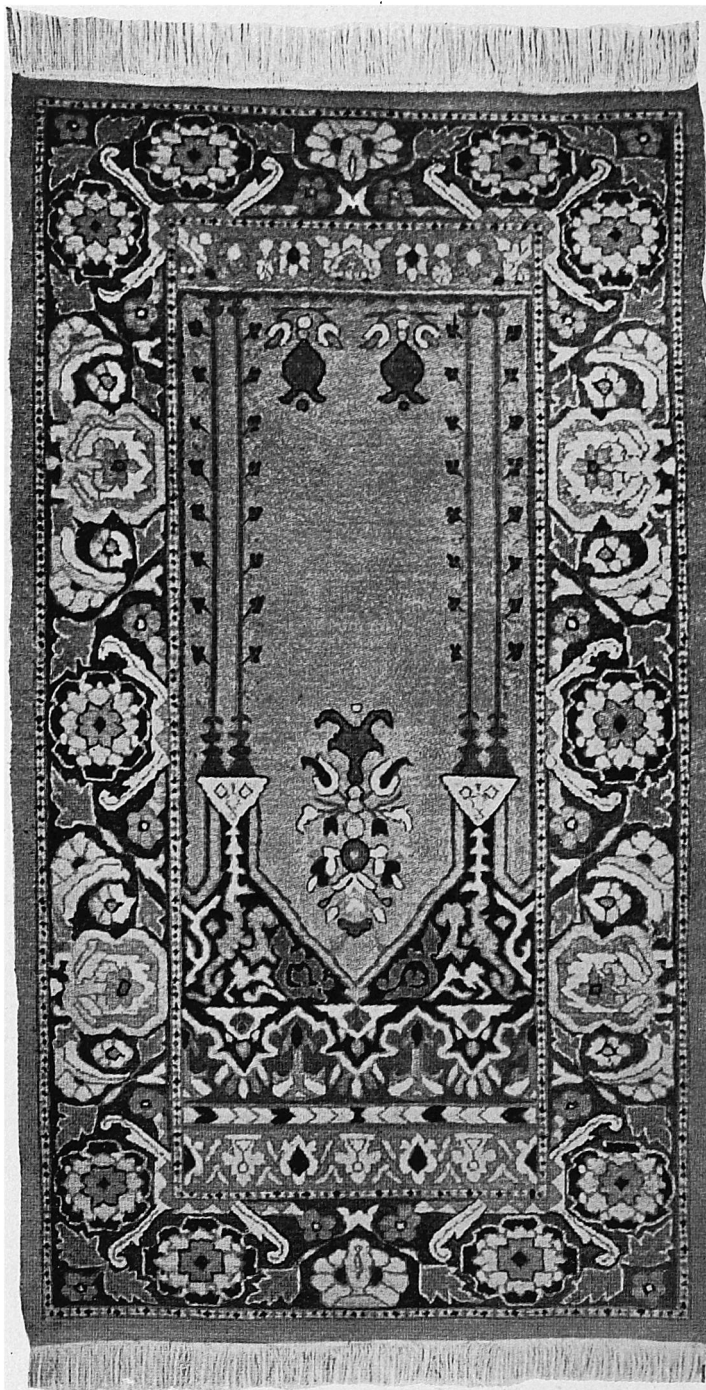
And so with the other rug-weavers of the Orient. Their colors are to them a language; and while the expression may seem forced it is nevertheless in a sense true that the weavers work into their rugs a sort of poetry, which only the initiated can read. The same practice is followed to-day as in antiquity, despite the fact that the Western merchants, by the all-powerful means of according or withholding patronage, have made their influence felt in the matter of patterns and colors, just as traders in the Western states have forced the weavers of the Navajo blankets to corrupt the simple, chaste patterns of early days into showier fabrics "that sell."

It would be impracticable in a short article to enumerate and describe the many different kinds of Oriental rugs imported from the East and offered for sale in the Western market. There are dozens of them, each with its own peculiar characteristics in point of pattern and coloring, each also giving evidence of the tribe or family that made it and the source of the wool that entered into its manufacture. The expert trader has but to see a finished fabric to determine from what country or people it came.

One general feature is observable, however, in all work of this class. In modern times and Western nations, finished works of art, as in painting and sculpture, are produced. These works are designed to stand by themselves, without subserving any ulterior decorative effect in connection with other objects. There is, moreover, a craze for novelty, and he who can create a new design or produce a new effect has his reward in a quickly earned popularity.

In the artistic nations of Asia, however, in antiquity all art was decorative, and was meant to serve a utilitarian purpose. The conservative character of the people and their attachment to the past have given persistence to their ideas, and their artistic work to-day is decorative and utilitarian. Indeed, we can find in the rugs of southern Persia to-day practically the same patterns and the same colors as when Ctesiphon was sacked by the Arabs fifteen hundred years ago.

Western manufacturers ransack the world for new ideas, and every



INDIAN PRAYER RUG  
From "Rugs Oriental and Occidental"  
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season must perforce bring its new styles. But despite the fact that the production of Oriental rugs runs in families, and each family has its peculiarities, it would not be a difficult thing to trace the genesis of a particular product of to-day back from tribe to tribe and from age to age to early Egypt, which many students think the source of the industry.

Indeed, the early tapestries of Europe and the first carpets of Western manufacture might be traced in a similar way. It will be remembered that carpet-making in the West dates from the reign of Henry IV. of France, when Persian carpet-weavers were brought to Beauvais. That gave impetus to a new industry which has dwarfed in the magnitude of its output the product of the East.

That rug-making in the East should have been one of the most highly prized arts, and should have developed into one of the greatest industries in the Asiatic countries—a great industry in the East is something entirely different from what we term a great industry in the Western world, for the total rug product of the Asiatic countries probably does not exceed a million dollars a year—is scarcely a matter of surprise. The habits of the people, their mode of life, their style of architecture, their customs in the matter of home furnishing, all tended to foster the industry. Rugs are the Oriental's carpets, his bed, his wrappings during periods of travel, coverings for his walls and portières for his doorways, decorations for his temples, mats on which to kneel in prayer, trappings for pageants; in fact, almost everything from purposes of utility to those of high art.

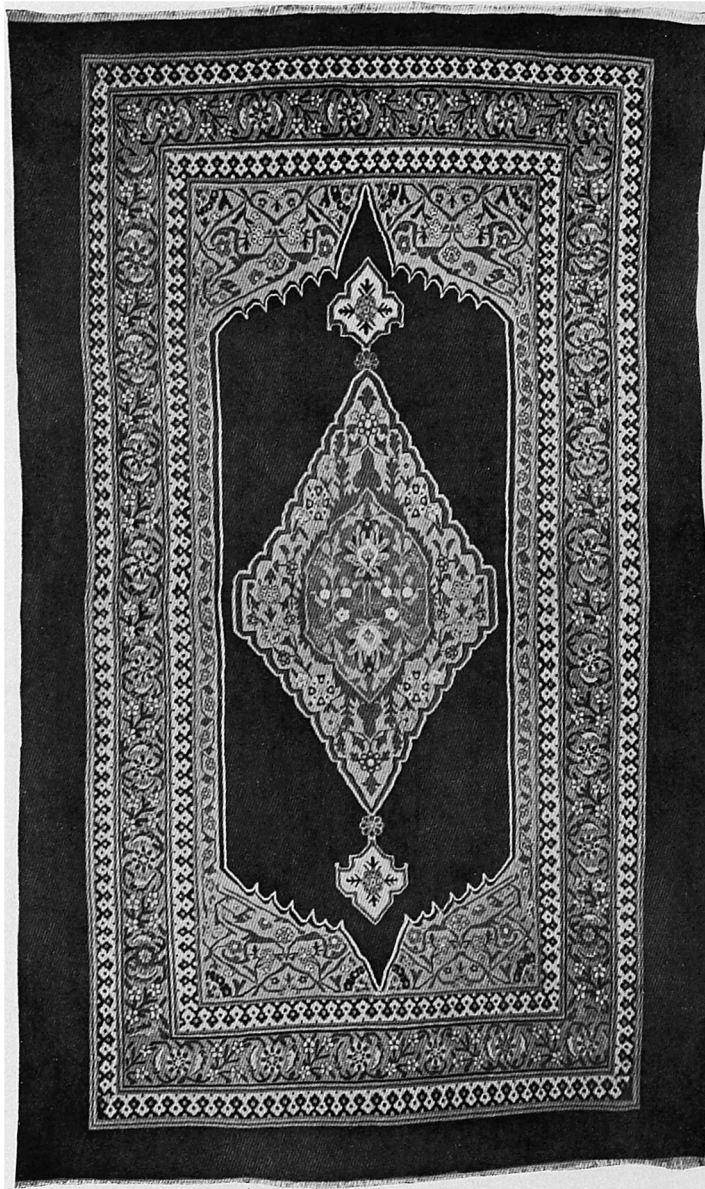
Each nation or district followed its own bent, and trained up its own rug-making families into something like national or district guilds. Some time in the forgotten past the stamp of approval was put upon certain products; some patterns produced by clever workwomen met popular favor, and acceptance of the fabrics was taken as a tacit order to perpetuate them; some combinations of colors struck the Eastern fancy with a similar result, and, we may suppose, some other combinations of colors produced by less skillful manipulators proved an offense to the Oriental eye and were placed under ban, till similar combinations of color became an unheard of occurrence in the industry.

Thus, gradually through the centuries, styles of pattern and schemes of color became fixed. No one will ever know of the daring experiments that resulted in failure and rejection, but we do know that, however numerous these unfortunate experiments were, the accepted patterns and color schemes became limited to a few, so that to-day the entire output of Persian rugs comprises only about thirty patterns. Every weaver, as said before, works in her own little individual variations, which are oftener a matter of chance or accident than design; but for a weaver of to-day to produce a rug with pattern or color scheme in sharp departure from the accepted types that have

come down through the ages would be deemed little less than a sacrilege.

The value of an Eastern rug depends on the fineness of the wool, the quality of the dye, and the closeness of the knots, which make a full or a scant pile. The pile speaks for itself to every shrewd purchaser as regards its closeness. The pile of old rugs, however, is often trimmed to remove traces of wear or age. Colors, too, are often doctored by clever workmen who have learned cunningly to touch up with water-colors faded or discolored fabrics, so as to give them the semblance of freshness and richness.

The reds are especially subject to this sort of treatment, and the purchaser who is about to invest in a costly rug would do well to rub suspected spots with a damp cloth to detect the fraud.



SARAKHS RUG  
From "Rugs Oriental and Occidental"  
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That all or even a majority of the rugs of the Orient are beautiful, few of Western birth, perhaps, would maintain. But this much must be said of the product as a whole: setting aside all considerations of durability and pattern, the rich, harmonious colorings prompted by Oriental taste are superb. The deep, subdued tones were a revelation when they were introduced into the Western world, and they have had a marked influence on Western decoration. It is to be doubted if the product of the looms of Kidderminster, Wilton, Worcester, Rothdale, Halifax, Dewsbury, and Durham, in England, or of our own Philadelphia, would be what they are to-day in point of artistic coloring were it not for the examples set by the plodding, convention-tied women of the East, who have learned the secret of mixing dyes that last for ages and please without palling.

W. G. MARQUIS.

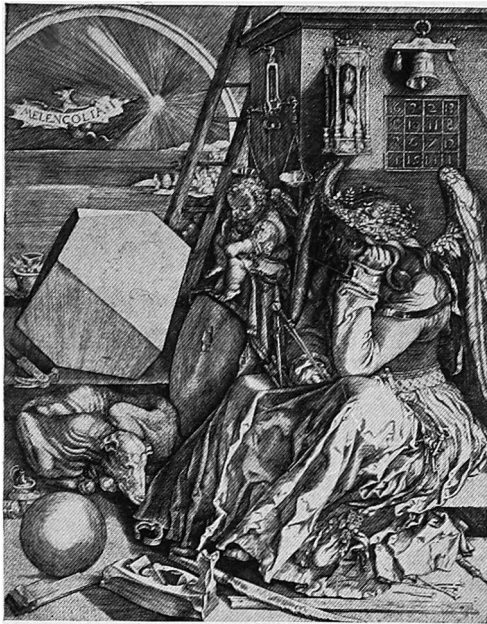


## CONVENTION IN ART

When Japanese art had begun to be known generally in Europe and in America the criticism was frequently made that it was exceedingly conventional. As a matter of fact, it was scarcely more conventional than our own art; its

conventionalities were only different from those of Occidental art, and as they were less familiar more notice was taken of them. Many of them have now been accepted and incorporated into Western art, and have ceased to be considered as arbitrary characteristics.

From childhood we have been taught to make our judgment of artistic representations of every kind, dependent upon a tacit agreement to accept as truthful representation many things which are but little more than symbols, to say nothing of certain broad generalities of such agreements, as that a sculptured figure shall not be expected to



LA MELANCOLIE  
Original Engraving by Albert Durer  
Showing Conventional Drapery



ORIENTAL RUG

From "Rugs Oriental and Occidental"

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